

ALL THAT JAZZ

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Oscar Peterson was a world-renowned jazz musician who dropped out of school at 14 to pursue his career.

But he never forgot the value of an education. In the mid-1980s, he was an adjunct music professor at York University, than its chancellor in the early 1990s.

Now, there is an elementary school named after Mr. Peterson in Stouffville.

SCHOOL COUNCIL'S IDEA

Oscar Peterson Public School, which opened in September on Hoover Park Drive, held its official opening ceremonies last Thursday. The school replaced Orchard Park Public School, which shut down last June.

"I just feel a sense of pride every time I drive by and see it," said Norm Peterson, one of Mr. Peterson's sons and a resident of Whitchurch-Stouffville for 30 years.

"The school has a wonderful musical and cultural influence and we didn't have

anything to do with that at all."

"He would have been so thrilled because he had such a passion for children and education," said Oscar's youngest daughter, Celine Peterson.

Naming a school after a prominent Canadian is nothing new. Within York Region alone, schools are named for Lester B. Pearson, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Dr. Roberta Bondar and Terry Fox.

Mr. Peterson's name was brought forward by the Orchard Park school council in January 2008.

"We liked how Oscar Peterson was a notable Canadian ... but he had family in the area and the initials matched the old school. It was such a perfect fit," said Lorelea Carruthers, the York Region District School Board trustee for East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

As well, the school's name "would give us a vehicle to explore the arts, creativity and diversity with our students," Ms Carruthers said.

Oscar Peterson began playing the piano and trum-

pet as a young boy under the tutelage of his father, Daniel Peterson, a West Indian immigrant who worked as a railway porter.

He continued with his piano studies under the watch of his older sister Daisy after tuberculosis damaged his lungs at the age of six.

At 14, Mr. Peterson won CBC's national amateur contest and with his father's permission, Mr. Peterson dropped out of school to focus on his musical career.

STOUFFVILLE SON

Mr. Peterson earned eight Grammy awards, including a lifetime achievement award in 1997, as well as hundreds of prizes from the jazz community, the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for lifetime achievement and was a Companion of the Order of Canada.

In 2005, Canada Post marked his contribution to music with a 50-cent stamp.

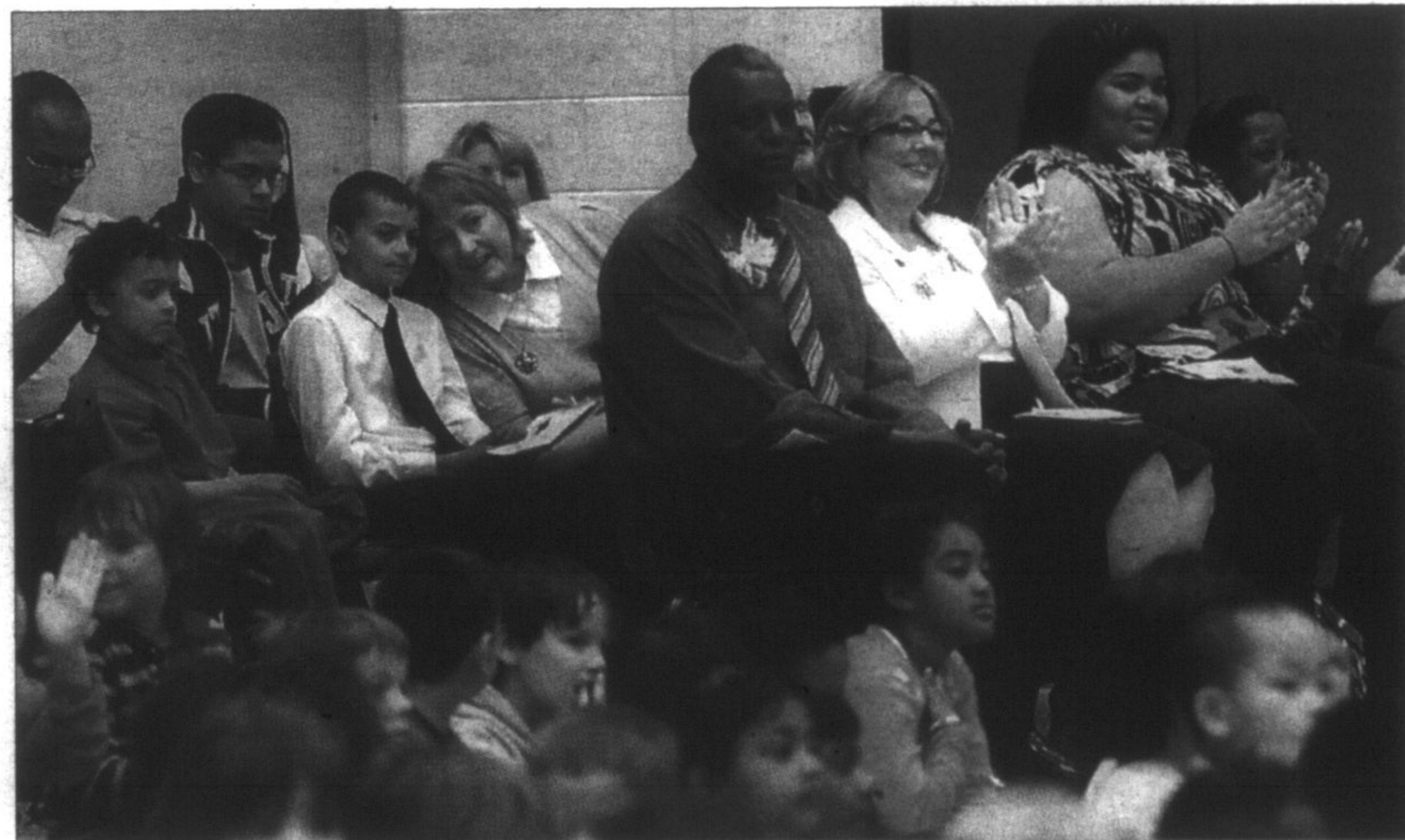
Mr. Peterson died Dec. 23, 2007, at the age of 82.

— with files from *TorStar News Service*



Oscar Peterson Public School's Concert Choir struts its stuff during opening of school.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SJOERD WITTEVEEN



The Oscar Peterson family, including son Norman Peterson (front row, from left); Oscar's widow, Kelly Peterson, Oscar's daughter Celine and his sister May, applaud the ceremonies.



Oscar Peterson principal Laura Ryckman chats with regional education director Bill Hogarth and student guides Enoch Ncube (left) and Sharyar Ahmed during the Stouffville school's official opening last Thursday.

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